



2LT Morjan Montalvo, a tank commander with the 1st Armored Division's 2nd Bn., 37th Armor, in Friedburg, awaits an order to move out during unit training at Hohenfels.

Europe's Premier Training Sites

Story and Photos
by Heike Hasenauer

THE Army's Combat Maneuver Training Center in Hohenfels, Germany — once used by Gen. Erwin Rommel to train his Afrika Corps for World War II, and operated by U.S. Army, Europe's 7th Army Training Command since the 1980s — is the premier training site for Army units in Europe.

Together with its firing-range assets at the Grafenwöhr Training Area, about an hour's drive from Hohenfels, the 7th ATC prepares soldiers for contingency operations anywhere within USAREUR's area of responsibility — the Balkans and the southernmost part of North Africa — said CPT Jeffrey Settle, a command spokesman.

As the smallest of the Army's three combat training centers — the others are the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, La., and the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, Calif. — CMTC encompasses only 100 square miles, compared to 180 at JRTC and 1,000 at NTC. But CMTC, located about 50 miles from the Czech border, is every bit as high-tech and valuable in training soldiers for combat as the others, Settle said.

"The crown jewel of all the Army's training is the combat training centers," said 7th ATC chief of staff COL Robert Fulcher Jr.

Units in Europe travel 200 to more than 400 miles (from Vicenza, Italy) to come to Hohenfels, the primary maneuver area, and Grafenwöhr, the primary live-fire training area in Germany, Fulcher said. Annually, every designated task force in Germany visits Hohenfels at least once and Grafenwöhr twice.

While CMTC can accommodate up to brigade-sized combat teams, putting them through high-intensity combat scenarios to prepare for missions in places like Bosnia and Kosovo, its training is geared more toward squads, teams and companies, Settle said.



SSG Anthony Hunt, an opposing force tank commander whose mock T-80 tank was "killed" by blue forces, waits out an ongoing "battle" by planning future tactical moves.

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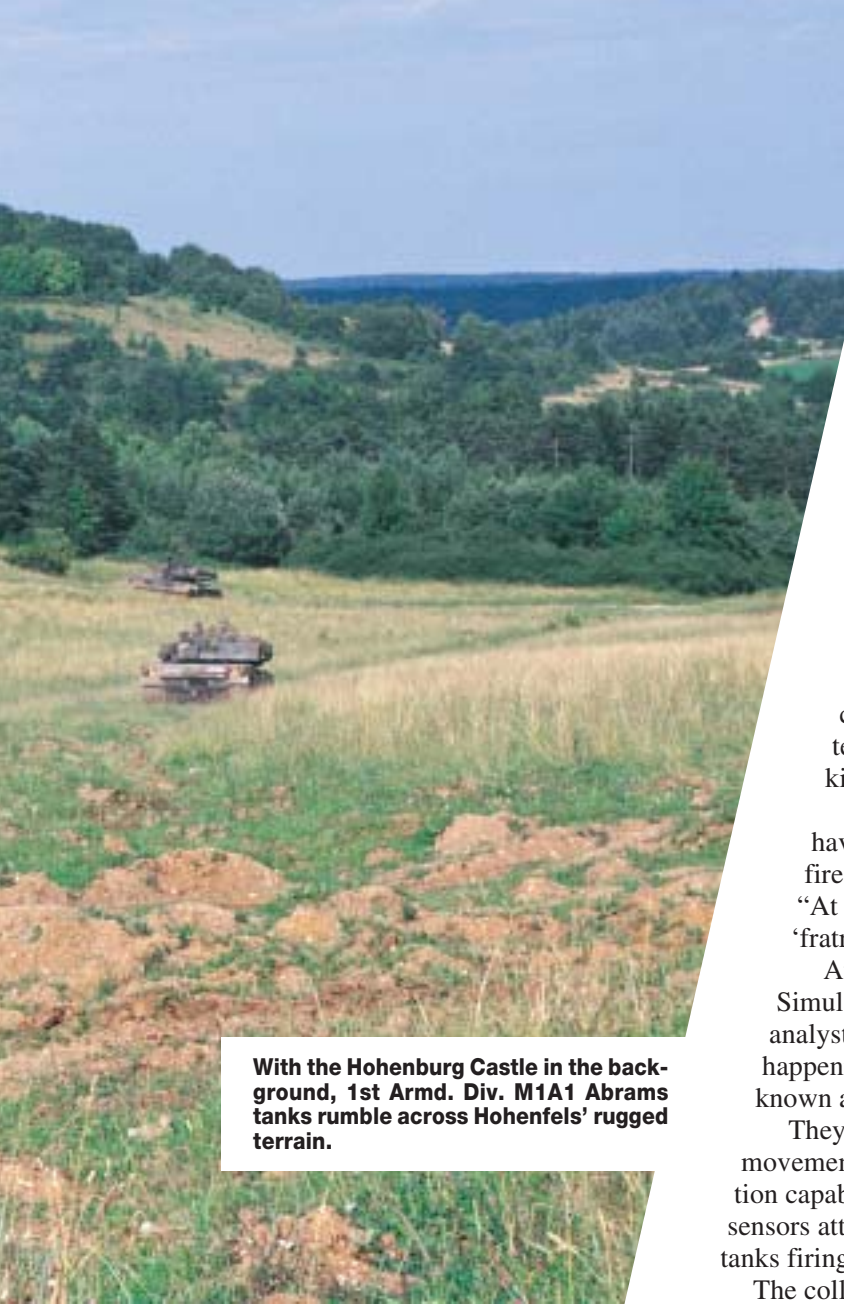


They monitor various computer displays to determine (active, disabled or without communication capability) and

(Right) Operators at Grafenwöhr's virtual training facility manipulate the graphics and special effects seen by soldiers training in the CCTT.

(Far right) An antitank gunner atop an OPFOR vehicle waits for a suitable target.





With the Hohenburg Castle in the background, 1st Armd. Div. M1A1 Abrams tanks rumble across Hohenfels' rugged terrain.

*vehicle movement and status
gather other information ...*



Other training focuses on stability and support operations, as well as on terrorism and black-marketing.

Air Force and Marine Corps units also train at CMTC, as do units from European nations, Settle said.

To achieve realism in urban warfare training, CMTC offers five MOUT training sites, said CPT Brian Williams, of CMTC's permanent-party opposing force, the 1st Battalion, 4th Infantry.

"The premier MOUT site is a large, built-up 'city' called 'Ubungsdorf' that's complete with electricity, running water and video cameras inside the buildings to record every action," he said.

LTC Perry Helton, commander of the 1st Bn., 4th Inf., said soldiers are trained to fight differently at each of the combat training centers. "Here, training is much more conducive to dismounted infantry for a combined fight. At NTC, you can see for four kilometers, with nothing in the way. Here, if you get a one-kilometer range to shoot something, it's rare."

"Because we're training in such a compact area, units have more difficulty coordinating direct and indirect fires," said Williams, a former member of NTC's OPFOR. "At NTC, it's much easier to separate the forces to prevent 'fratricide.'"

At CMTC's Training Analysis Computer Support and Simulations center, better known as the "Stars Wars" center, analysts use the latest computer technology to follow what's happening in the 10-kilometer by 20-kilometer maneuver area, known as "the Box."

They monitor computer displays to determine vehicle movement and status (active, disabled or without communication capability) and gather other information from hundreds of sensors attached to vehicles. They can also "see" such actions as tanks firing, and determine whether the target has been "hit."

The collective information is provided to units at the end of every exercise in very precise after-action reviews that are tough to dispute, Settle said.

At another of CMTC's high-tech facilities, the Leader Training Center, simulation-driven staff exercises prepare leaders for their unit's training before the arrival of the main group of soldiers and their equipment.

Simulation centers throughout USAREUR, including one in Vicenza, contribute respective "battle" assets when they're needed, to realistically simulate scenarios from a corps battle to a joint theater of war. They play important roles in joint exercises in Europe involving the military forces of other nations.

At Grafenwöhr's Virtual Training Facility, "units training in the Close Combat Tactical Trainer can 'fire' millions of dollars worth of tank ammunition, without actually spending money," said USAREUR's simulation training NCO, SSG David Williams. In reality, it costs up to \$4,000 to fire one training round, Williams said, and about \$240 just to maneuver an M1A1 tank about a mile.

The graphics and special effects built into the CCTT are impressive, said

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OPFOR vehicles race toward BLUEFOR positions during a movement-to-contact exercise at Hohenfels.

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senior operator Tim Maples. “I can make it ‘rain’ and give a crew limited visibility. If it rains long enough, I can make the fields impassable.”

The \$66 million simulation equipment has paid for itself six times over in tank-round savings alone,” Williams said.

And, following actual field-training events, CMTC’s instrumented command-and-control system is a valuable resource in demonstrating to a unit the effectiveness of its actions, said LTC Rich Tottleben. “That’s the hardest thing for an observer-controller to do.

“The system doesn’t lie,” Tottleben said. “It can record entire tactical-radio network communications. So we can play back the communication between the commander and his units, allowing him to listen to his requests for movements.” The system can even sense some simulated weapons effects, such as minefields and chemical agents.

“It captures losses and looks for trends,” Tottleben added, “to show how well tanks are firing and how many things were ‘destroyed’ by artillery, as examples.” The system also provides a safety net. “When vehicles are tracking, we can find, through vector control, anyone who’s lost.”

Technological wizardry aside, soldiers up to their knees in mud in a field training event can benefit from “one of the greatest of CMTC’s assets — the observer-controllers,” said Settle.

The junior and senior officers have combat experience and are able to give soldiers realistic feedback about their training, said observer-controller MAJ Thomas McKeivitt. “They recommend ways units might have done some things differently.”

CMTC’s OPFOR is structured as any other mechanized battalion, but augmented with additional assets to make it more fearsome, he said. It includes more infantry, engineer, military intelligence and air defense assets to challenge a brigade combat team in a high-intensity, combat-training scenario.

OPFOR players operate in a free-thinking capacity, “taking opportunities as they see them,” McKeivitt said.

“Everybody wants to win, so we have to ensure there’s no cheating. If an OPFOR vehicle drives through a ‘minefield,’ for example, we ‘kill’ the vehicle, because that’s what would happen in real life. The same is true if a BLUEFOR vehicle is in the treeline and the OPFOR shoots it, but its MILES gear doesn’t go off.”

Additionally, Air Force personnel stationed at Hohenfels add to training realism by integrating close-air support. And a small airfield can accommodate a C-130, Settle said. A training area in

Amberg is used as a logistics base for air assets, to provide more realistic distances over which units must move equipment and supplies.

Meantime, on the ground, about 70 role-playing civilians situate themselves at various locations on the “battlefield,” tending gardens, driving vehicles to market or herding sheep. “During mission-rehearsal exercises to train units for actual missions, the civilians surge to about 200,” Tottleben said.

This added civilian element helps soldiers understand that people and their activities can’t be ignored, he said.

At the same time, media on the battlefield grill soldiers for information. Mock international reporters expose soldiers to situations that will likely occur in real-life contingency operations and teach them how to respond appropriately.

Commanders planning to train their units at Hohenfels follow specific, USAREUR-directed training guidelines, but they decide what scenarios will be played out to hone their unit’s specific skills, Settle said.

Before deploying to CMTC, soldiers undergo home-station training. Then they travel to Grafenwöhr to hone common-tasks skills, taking advantage of more than 40 live-fire ranges and some 60 artillery- and mortar-firing positions.

Other assets available to commanders include small-arms ranges, a land-navigation course, leadership-reaction course, obstacle course, nuclear-biological-chemical chamber and a drop zone.

The Aerial Weapons Scoring System allows aviators to train on Hellfire-missile firing procedures and gauge their rocket-firing skills without firing actual missiles.

At Hohenfels, companies spend roughly five days undergoing situational training exercises to prepare for 14 days of battalion-level operations against the

OPFOR, Tottleben said. “That’s the point when we say, ‘The gloves are off,’ the OPFOR becomes aggressive.” Six major and some minor “battles” fill the grueling weeks that follow.

It’s all part of the 7th ATC’s job to train USAREUR’s soldiers for today’s critical missions, wherever they might be, Tottleben said. □



A line charge explodes over a simulated minefield to clear a path for advancing tanks during an exercise at Grafenwöhr.